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CIA, Military Ride High on Space Shuttle

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The Defense Department and the CIA are becoming more deeply involved in the space shuttle program as that program nears its final testing stage.

In fact, the growing strategic role of the shuttle is threatening some other U.S. space programs as backers of the shuttle search for an estimated \$600 million to protect the program's defense-related aspects from the shuttle's latest cost overrun.

The strategic side of the shuttle also is causing the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to tighten security around several of its installations, cutting off public access to certain sections and "hardening" electronic communications against outside interference and eavesdropping.

NASA gave a detailed explanation of the latest defense-related developments in the shuttle program last week during a closed session before three House Appropriations subcommittees interested in the massive \$16 million space shuttle program.

OFFICIALS OF NASA and the Air Force — the lead agency on the defense aspects of the shuttle — made their case for more money to keep the schedule for the shuttle's defense payloads from slipping. According to sources, among the roles for the shuttle that were emphasized were:

- The need to use the shuttle to put up improved spy satellites to give the United States a greater capacity to verify a SALT II treaty. The satellites would help replace the surveillance sites lost in Iran.
- The need to replace current military communication satellites with heavier, "jam-proof" devices that could survive during electronic warfare.

Dr. William J. Perry, defense undersecretary for research and engineer-

ing, told some members of the subcommittees before the hearing that the Defense Department's expanded schedule for use of the shuttle now includes 113 launches during the first 10 years of the program.

To manage the the Air Force's role in the program, Perry explained that Brig. Gen. Ralph Jacobson has been detailed to NASA. The Defense Department also is spending about \$12 million to protect the security of the upper floor of NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. Similar changes are under way at the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral.

NASA AND THE Air Force, according to sources, also are working out new arrangements to have selected astronauts with security clearances fly the shuttle when special defense payloads are to be launched.

Although the Defense Department has been a major partner in the space shuttle program since it was initiated in 1969, the details of that partnership have largely secret. The CIA's role in the program is even more hazy.

"They are an important customer of the Air Force," was the way one source put it.

Last month Sen. Lowell Weicker Jr., R-Conn., one of the earliest supporters of the shuttle, wrote Dr. Robert A. Frosch, administrator of NASA, that he was "disturbed" to learn in a closed briefing by the CIA's Director Stansfield Turner of a "close interface between NASA and the CIA" on the shuttle program.

Weicker said that the development was "contrary" to the traditional separation between the civilian and military space programs, adding that he was "fearful that it may jeopardize the involvement of the scientific community in the peaceful exploration and development of space."

ASKED ABOUT the letter, Weicker said that the intensity of the CIA's involvement in the program came as a "surprise" to him. "Before, when I justified the space program in my state," he said, "I could always differentiate that program from the military."

NASA's latest estimate is that by 1984, when the program's four orbiting four space shuttles are scheduled to be built, the program ahead will have cost \$16 billion, about \$4 billion of that coming from the military.

That amount is about \$600 million higher than NASA had forecast, Frosch has explained, because money has been shifted from the production of the later satellites to the design, development and testing of the first shuttlecraft — Columbia — now scheduled to fly sometime in early 1980.

The crunch will be felt primarily by the last two shuttles, Discovery and Atlantis, which were to have begun operations at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California in 1983 and 1984.

THE TWO SHUTTLES are critical to the Defense-CIA program because Vandenberg is the base where satellites are launched into a polar orbit, regarded as the best orbit for spy satellites.

Members of the House Appropriations Committee appeared to agree with NASA and the Air Force that the money must be found to keep the military project on schedule, but some of them, including a key subcommittee chairman, Rep. Edward P. Boland, D-Mass., have indicated that the money might come "out of NASA's hide," primarily out of its larger science-related space missions.

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